

# **History of Language 1**

## **The Origin of Language**

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# Coursebook

This study provides essential context, concepts, and information regarding the evolution of spoken and written language, including historical shifts in language usage. We will explore the dynamic nature of the English language as it has transformed and continues to evolve.

The course is structured around four significant historical periods: Old English, which encompasses the language spoken in England from the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the late fifth century to the Norman conquest; Middle English (1100-1500); Early Modern English; and Modern English (15th century to the present day).

# Student's Obligation

- Attendance is mandatory.
- Students must arrive to class on time; any lateness will be treated as an absence.
- Talking during lectures is totally forbidden.
- The use of cell phones during lectures is strictly prohibited.
- Being prepared and actively participating in all activities are essential for achieving success.

# Assessment

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% of the final grade</b>
Participation and attendance	10 %
Presentation	10 %
Midterm Examination	20 %
Final exam	60 %
Total	100 %

# Course Topics

- The origin of Language
- The beginnings of English
- Old English
- The Normans in English
- Middle English
- Modern English begins
- Bringing order to English
- English in America
- The future of English
- All kinds of English

# References

- The History of the English Language by Brigit Viney 2003.
- The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the British Language:  
David Crystal 2003.
- The Story of England by Christopher Hibbert 1992

# **The Origins of Language**

- **The origin of cosmos**
- **The origin of life**
- **The origins of language**

# The Origin of Cosmos: The Big Bang Theory

The Big Bang Theory is the leading explanation about how the universe began.

At its simplest, it says the universe as we know it started with a small singularity, then inflated over the next **13.8 billion years** to the cosmos that we know today.



# The Origin of Life

It is generally agreed that all life today evolved by common descent from a single primitive life form.

It is not known how this early form came about, but scientists think it was a natural process that took place perhaps **4 million years ago**.

# The Earliest Spoken Forms

There is suspicion that some type of spoken language must have developed between **100,000** and **50,000** years ago, well before written language (about **5,000** years ago).

Yet, among the traces of earlier periods of life on earth, we never find **any direct evidence** or artifacts relating to the speech of our distant ancestors that might tell us how language was back in the early stages.

# The Earliest Writing Systems

The earliest writing systems evolved independently and at roughly the same time in Egypt and Mesopotamia, but current scholarship suggests that Mesopotamia's writing appeared first. That writing system, invented by the Sumerians, emerged in Mesopotamia around 3500 BC.

# The Cuneiform Writing System

Cuneiform is a system of writing first developed by the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia 3000 BC.

This early writing was consisted of making specific marks in wet clay with a reed implement. It is the most significant among the many cultural contributions of the Sumerians.



# The Hieroglyphic Writing System

Hieroglyphic writing is a system that employs characters in the form of pictures. Ancient Egyptians invented this pictorial script. Because of their pictorial form, hieroglyphs were difficult to write and were used only for monument inscriptions.



# **The Origins of Language**

- 1. The divine source**
- 2. The natural sound source (bow-wow theory and The pooh-pooh theory)**
- 3. The social interaction source (The “yo-he-ho” theory)**
- 4. The physical adaptation source**
- 5. The tool-making source**
- 6. The genetic source**

## **First: The Divine Source**

The notion of a divine source as an origin for language is a concept deeply rooted in religious and mythological beliefs across different cultures throughout history.

This perspective attributes the creation of language to a divine or supernatural force. While it lacks empirical evidence, it holds significant cultural and theological importance in various faith systems.

# First: The Divine Source

There are roughly 4,200 religions in the world. In this respect, There are three main types of theism:

- **Monotheism** — the belief in one God.  
(Islam, Christianity, and Judaism)
- **Polytheism** —the belief in many gods.  
(as in Hinduism and Buddhism and the ancient Greeks)
- **Atheism** — the belief in no God.



## First: The Divine Source

Islam, one of the world's major monotheistic religions, is guided by the Quran, which Muslims believe to be the literal word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Holy Book Quran is considered the source of divine language :

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

## **Second: The Natural Sound Source**

- A. The Bow-Wow Theory---** (the sounds of things)
- B. The Pooh-Pooh Theory---** (the sounds of emotions)

## **Second: The Natural Sound Source**

### **The Bow-Wow Theory**

The "Bow-Wow Theory" suggests that language originally developed from imitations of natural sounds. According to the Bow-Wow Theory, early human language evolved as people tried to mimic the sounds of animals and the natural environment.

In essence, the theory proposes that the first words in human language were imitative of the noises made by animals and objects in the environment. For example, words like "buzz" to mimic the sound of a bee or "moo" to mimic the sound of a cow would have originated from attempts to imitate these sounds. Words that sound similar to the noises they describe are examples of onomatopoeia.

# Second: The Natural Sound Source

## The Pooh-Pooh Theory

The "Pooh-Pooh Theory" is another linguistic hypothesis regarding the origins of language, and it suggests that language developed from emotional or instinctive exclamations and outbursts.

According to the Pooh-Pooh Theory, early humans communicated primarily through instinctive emotional expressions, such as laughter, crying, shouts of joy, and expressions of pain. These emotional vocalizations gradually evolved into more structured and meaningful forms of communication. Here are some examples: *Ouch, Ah, Oh, Yay.*

## **Third: The Social Interaction Source**

### **The "Yo-He-Ho Theory"**

The "Yo-He-Ho" Theory is another hypothesis regarding the origins of language, and it suggests that early human language developed from coordinated efforts in activities such as hunting, gathering, or other forms of cooperative work.

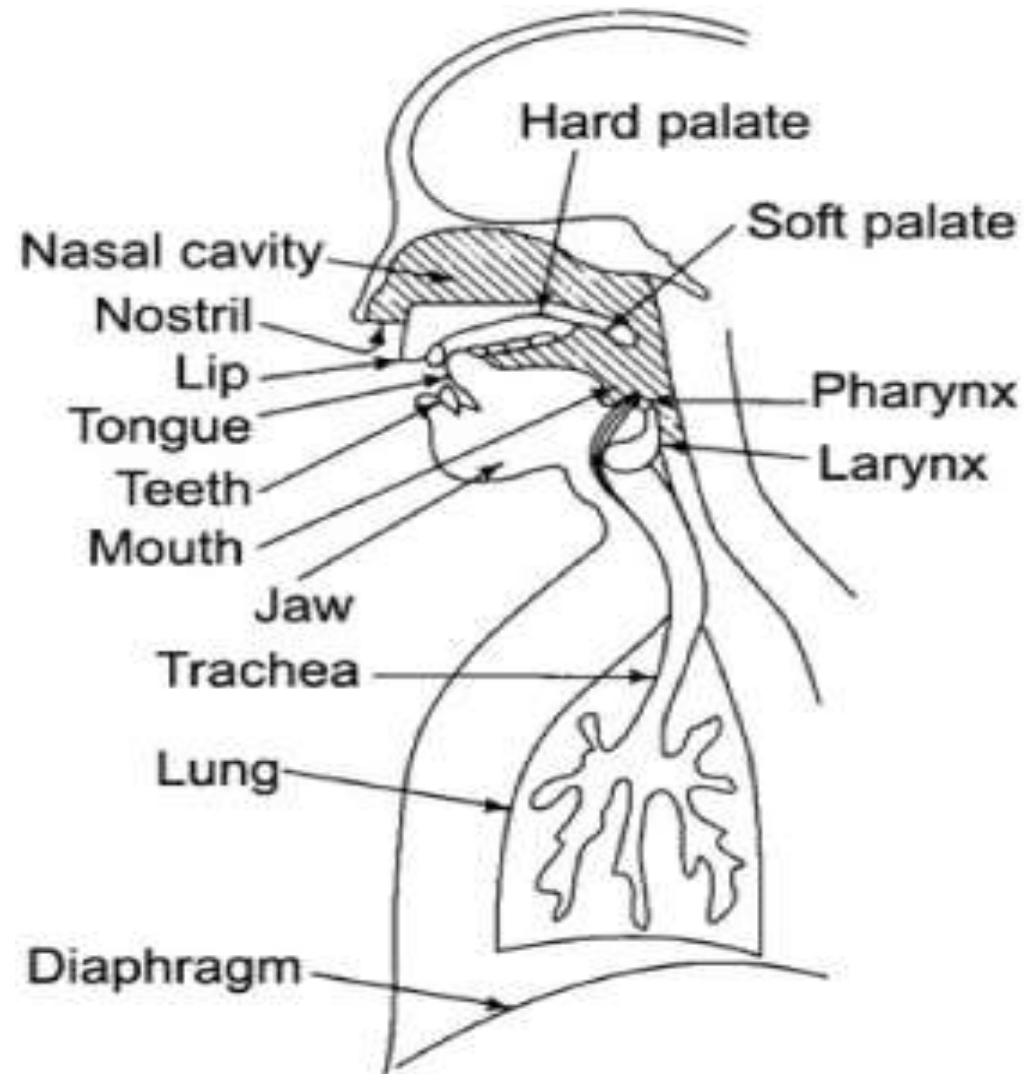
This theory is based on the idea that language evolved as a means to facilitate group coordination and cooperation in tasks that required collective effort. So, a group of early humans might develop a set of hums, grunts, groans, and curses that were used when they were lifting and carrying large bits of trees or lifeless hairy mammoths.

## **Fourth: The Physical Adaptation Source**

Instead of looking at types of sounds as the source of human speech, we can look at the types of physical features humans possess, especially those that are distinct from other creatures, which may have been able to support speech production.

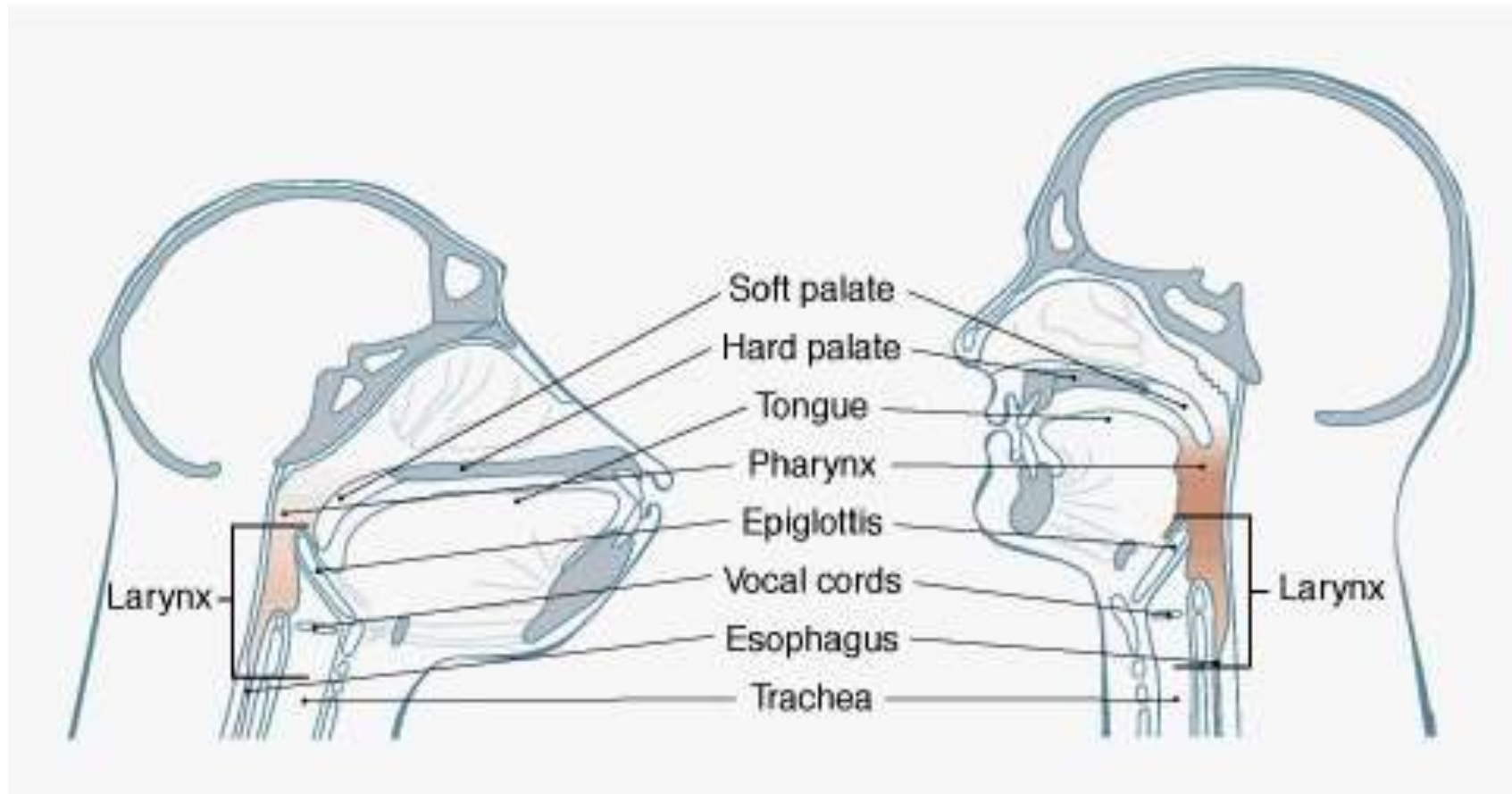
The idea that physical adaptations played a significant role in the origin of language is a theory that suggests that certain functional and physiological changes in early humans were crucial for the development of spoken language. This theory focuses on the physical attributes and adaptations that enabled our ancestors to produce and perceive speech sounds.

# Fourth: The Physical Adaptation Source



# Fourth: The Physical Adaptation Source

## The differences between a human and a chimpanzee





## **Fourth: The Physical Adaptation Source: The Differences between a Human and a Chimpanzee**

**Human teeth** are upright, not slanting outwards like those of apes, and they are roughly even in height. They are also very helpful in making sounds such as *f* or *v* .

**Human lips** have much more intricate muscle interlacing than is found in other primates and their resulting flexibility certainly helps in making sounds like *p* or *b* .

## **Fourth: The Physical Adaptation Source: The Differences between a Human and a Chimpanzee**

**The human mouth** is relatively small compared to other primates, can be opened and closed rapidly, and contains a smaller, thicker, and more muscular tongue which can be used to shape a wide variety of sounds inside the oral cavity. Unlike other primates, humans can close off the **airway** through the **nose** to create more air pressure in the **mouth**.

The overall effect of these small differences taken together is a face with more complicated muscle interlacing in the lips and mouth, capable of a wider range of shapes and a more rapid and powerful delivery of sounds produced through these different shapes.



## **Fifth: The Tool-Making Source**

Some believe that manual gestures could have served as a preliminary form of language. Approximately two million years ago, there are indications that humans had acquired a preference for using their right hand and had acquired the ability to craft tools from stone and wood.

The act of crafting tools, which involves manipulating objects and modifying them with both hands, serves as evidence of active brain functioning.

## **Fifth: The Tool-Making Source**

The tool-making Source theory suggests that the need for communication to facilitate tool-making activities was a driving force behind the development of language.

As early humans created and used more advanced tools, they relied on language to share knowledge, coordinate tasks, and solve problems, ultimately leading to the evolution of language as a complex system of communication.

# **Sixth: The Genetic Source Innateness Hypothesis**

At birth, the baby's brain is only a quarter of its eventual weight and the larynx is much higher in the throat, allowing babies to breathe and drink at the same time. In a relatively short period of time, the larynx descends, the brain develops, and the child assumes an upright posture and starts walking and talking.

Even children who are born deaf (and do not develop speech) become fluent sign language users, given appropriate circumstances, very early in life. This seems to indicate that human offspring are born with a special capacity for language. It is innate, no other creature seems to have it.

# **Sixth: The Genetic Source Innateness Hypothesis**

The "Innateness Hypothesis" is a linguistic theory that proposes that humans are born with an inherent, biologically-based capacity for language. This hypothesis suggests that the ability to acquire and use language is encoded in our genes and is a natural and universal trait of the human species.

The Innateness Hypothesis is closely associated with the concept of "Universal Grammar," which was popularized by linguist Noam Chomsky. Universal Grammar suggests that there is a universal set of grammatical principles and structures common to all languages, and humans are born with an innate knowledge of these principles.

# Questions:

- What is the basic idea behind the “bow-wow” theory of language origin?
- Are interjections such as Ouch considered to be unlikely sources of human speech sounds? Why?
- Why do you think that young deaf children who become fluent in sign language would be cited in support of the innateness hypothesis?
- With which of the six “sources” would you associate this quotation?

*Chewing, licking, and sucking are extremely widespread mammalian activities, which, in terms of casual observation, have obvious similarities with speech.*

(MacNeilage, 1998)